

Message Text

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PAGE 01 ROME 11881 291539Z

46

ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 ISO-00 DPW-01 IO-14 PM-07 NSC-07 SP-03

SS-20 RSC-01 H-03 CIAE-00 INR-11 NSAE-00 DODE-00 L-03

PRS-01 SR-02 ORM-03 AID-20 DRC-01 /137 W

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P R 291437Z AUG 74

FM AMEMBASSY ROME

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6634

INFO AMEMBASSY SAIGON

S E C R E T ROME 11881

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINT, VT, VS

SUBJECT: PAPAL CONCERN OVER SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. VATICAN "FORMIN," ARCHBISHOP CASAROLI HAD HIS DEPUTY CALL ILLING TO VATICAN AUGUST 29 TO DISCUSS RATHER GLOOMY REPORT OF DETERIORATING MILITARY SITUATION IN RVN WHICH ARCHBISHOP LEMAITRE, APOSTOLIC DELEGATE IN SAIGON, HAD RECENTLY SENT IN. POPE PAUL WAS DEEPLY ALARMED BY REPORT AND ASKED CASAROLI IF HE COULD OBTAIN USG ESTIMATE OF SERIOUSNESS OF SITUATION.

2. REPORT BASED MAINLY ON INFORMATION PROVIDED BY BISHOPS IN NORTHERN AREAS OF COUNTRY, ESPECIALLY DA NANG AND HUE, STATES THAT IN LAST FEW MONTHS MILITARY BALANCE HAS SERIOUSLY TILTED IN FAVOR OF VIET CONG. BISHOPS ESTIMATE THAT AT LEAST 100,000 NEW REFUGEES HAVE FLED EXPANDING AREAS UNDER VIET CONG CONTROL AND THAT PACE OF KIDNAPPING, NOTABLY OF YOUNG PEOPLE AND OF VILLAGE LEADERS, HAS GREATLY INCREASED. BISHOPS ALSO SUSPECT VASTLY INCREASED PRESENCE OF DRV TROOPS.

3. GIVEN POPE PAUL'S OBVIOUS CONCERN, IT WOULD BE USEFUL IF WE COULD GIVE VATICAN A TIMELY REPLY. MIGHT ALSO BE WORTHWILE FOR AMBASSADOR LODGE TO BE PREPARED TO DISCUSS THIS MATTER ON HIS NEXT VISIT. VOLPE

SECRET

NNN

Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: REPORTS, REFUGEES, POLITICAL SITUATION, RELIGIOUS LEADERS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 29 AUG 1974
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: martinml
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1974ROME11881
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D740239-0921
From: ROME
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1974/newtext/t1974087/aaaaafxw.tel
Line Count: 52
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 1
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: martinml
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 23 MAY 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <23 MAY 2002 by elyme>; APPROVED <12 MAR 2003 by martinml>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: PAPAL CONCERN OVER SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM
TAGS: PFOR, PINT, VT, VS, (CASAROLI)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005